

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

May 2010

This newsletter provides quick updates on issues of interest to members and affiliates of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). This issue covers spring 2010.

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Ontario Budget signals higher education a top priority for province

Higher education remains a priority for the government, and Ontario universities fared well in the province's 2010 Budget, despite current fiscally challenging times. But the postsecondary sector has many issues to manage in the budget's wake, including developing strategies for internationalization and an online institute, managing compensation in compliance with the new legislative framework, and taking further steps to address the sustainability of university pension plans.

A centerpiece of the education component of the budget was funding for 11,000 students in 2010-2011. "Ontario universities are prepared to address these additional spaces to help the province achieve its goal of 70% of the population attaining higher education and to graduate the knowledge workers who will grow our economy," said Sheldon Levy, Chair of Council and President of Ryerson University. "We have already accommodated over 100,000 new students with the funding under the government's five-year Reaching Higher plan."

On the international front, COU has set up several working groups to develop an international strategy. While the government to date has focused mainly on recruitment, universities hope to broaden the approach since the internationalization of universities is central to ensuring the competitive advantage of Ontario.

"The province needs entrepreneurial thinkers with global experience, international networks between institutions and people, and more opportunities to build and leverage relationships," said Bonnie Patterson, President of COU. "To achieve this, we need to recruit and retain the best and brightest students and faculty from around the world, advance international research partnerships and increase opportunities for our students to study abroad."

Regarding the online institute, a group of Ontario university representatives are working with government on this initiative. Already there is a wide variety of courses online that can become the foundation for this new initiative, in addition to the successful collaborative online venture, the Scholars Portal, which boasts 12 million searches and 4 million downloads of journals yearly.

The Ontario budget also outlined and followed up with legislation that called for compensation restraint measures for the broader public sector for the next two years. Ontario universities are trying to determine the scope and impact of this legislation on their institutions and employees.

Additionally, the sector did not receive the much-hoped-for exemption from solvency funding that they had wanted related to university pension plans, so it is continuing to work with government to address its concerns and criteria for moving forward and, at the same time, work toward enhancing the long-term sustainability of the plans. Without the exemption from solvency funding, cuts to university operating budgets will be necessary to set aside sufficient funding in preparation for upcoming large special pension payments.

University demand continues to rise

The number of secondary school students applying for admission to first-year university rose 3.2% to 87,782 in 2010 from 85,081 in 2009, and the number of university choices grew 2.6% to 383,018 from 373,319, according to data from the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) released on March 10, 2010.

Since 2000, the number of secondary school students applying to Ontario universities has increased by 46.2%.

The total number of university applicants will get another boost later this year when mature, returning, transfer and international students apply. This group, which is called non-secondary school applicants, is also tracking 1.3% higher and could represent more than 45,000 applicants by the end of the application cycle in September 2010.

For more details, visit OUAC's website (<http://www.ouac.on.ca/news/news.htm>).

Universities advance accessibility on campuses through online training tool

An online tool was created to help universities comply with the training component of the Customer Service Standard of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*, and the response from users province-wide has been overwhelmingly positive. Faculty, staff, volunteers and contract workers at Ontario universities are now being trained on how to provide more accessible learning and support services in compliance with the AODA's first of five standards to be passed into regulation.

This tool, which is available in English and French, features an overview and three modules on the Customer Service Standard. Queen's University identified the need for this tool, and then in concert with COU, secured funding from the government's EnAbling Change Partnership and reached out to colleagues across the university sector for consultation.

The importance of this tool was underscored by McMaster University's recent resolution, which states its graduate students may not graduate or register for subsequent years in their program until they have completed their required training using this tool.

On the success of this interactive tool, a funding proposal was submitted to and ultimately approved by government to develop another online toolkit for all five AODA standards.

Two new university presidents on board for upcoming academic season

Two new members will be joining Council, along with Dr. Patrick Deane who will assume the presidency of McMaster University (featured in January's *Council Highlights*):

Dr. Richard Myers, ALGOMA UNIVERSITY

Dr. Richard Myers, a respected academic and administrator from St. Thomas University in Fredericton, will assume the helm of Algoma University on July 1, 2010.

A professor of political science, Dr. Myers boasts a 24-year career at St. Thomas that includes chairing the Department of Political Science and serving as Vice-President (Academic) for seven years. In the latter role, he focused on admission standards, enrolment management and increasing the recruitment of international students, and led the review that introduced science, science and technology studies, and fine arts courses.

"I am impressed by the clear and distinctive mission of Algoma University: its focus on teaching and its responsibility to contribute to the social and economic development of the region," said Dr. Myers. "I particularly look forward to working with our friends at Shingwauk Kinooamaage Gamig in support of their aspirations to improve educational opportunities for the local Anishinaabe communities."

Dr. Myers has been involved in national and international civil-society organizations including the New Brunswick College of Physicians and Surgeons and the 1993 Canadian mission that monitored the Russian elections. From 2004 to 2006 he chaired the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. Dr. Myers, who earned his BA, MA and PhD at the University of Toronto, has also taught at Hokusei Gakuen University (Japan) and Wenzhou University (China). He will succeed Dr. Celia Ross, who will have served as president for 12 years.

Government dollars at work on university campuses

Construction projects are well underway at Ontario university campuses that will improve the learning and research environments for undergraduate and graduate students as well as boost local economies, thanks to \$1.1 billion in funding from the federal and provincial governments.

Ontario universities are building new facilities, renovating older ones and technologically advancing classrooms to produce the talent and the research that Ontario needs to stay competitive in the knowledge economy. These projects have also created over 12,000 new jobs across Ontario and have increased the revenue for direct and indirect supplier companies, providing much-needed stimulus for local economies.

For more information on these projects, see the summary report entitled *Government Infrastructure Dollars at Work* that is posted on COU's website (www.cou.on.ca).

Dr. Brian J.R. Stevenson, LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

A leader in international and academic affairs, Dr. Brian J.R. Stevenson, has been named Lakehead University's sixth President. Dr. Stevenson, who serves as Provost and Vice-President Academic at the University of Winnipeg, will take office on August 1, 2010.

In his current position at the University of Winnipeg, Dr. Stevenson has spearheaded a number of key initiatives, including a new Faculty of Business and Economics, a new academic plan, new graduate programs, the establishment of a master's in Aboriginal governance, the promotion of international programs and a new enrolment strategy.

While recognizing the fiscal challenges facing all universities, Dr. Stevenson says that he wants "to focus on academic excellence at Lakehead, promoting research that will attract the best faculty available. I will be doing everything I can to ensure that Lakehead students have the best student experience." While he intends to "keep Fred Gilbert's dream for a law school alive," he also plans to spend his first three months meeting with various stakeholders to forge a plan to go forward on a variety of issues.

After teaching at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), Dr. Stevenson was appointed as Visiting Imperial Oil/Royal Bank Professor of International Business at the University of Alberta. He left to serve as Senior Policy Advisor in Ottawa to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, then returned to the university as Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (International) before taking leave to work in Washington, D.C., for the Organization of American States and later as a Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Dr. Stevenson received his honours BA and MA from the University of Victoria and his PhD in political studies from Queen's University. He will succeed Dr. Frederick Gilbert, who has served as president for 12 years.

New Quality Assurance Framework for undergraduate, graduate programs approved

A new Quality Assurance Framework was approved by Executive Heads of Ontario universities at their April meeting. The framework applies to all undergraduate and graduate programs offered by Ontario's publicly assisted universities. Also approved was the establishment of a new Quality Council, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, which will oversee the use of this framework province-wide.

Under the terms of the new framework, each Ontario university will develop its own Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) to reflect its mission and university degree-level expectations and meet the protocols established in the framework. Universities will submit their individual IQAPs to the Quality Council in the coming months for review and approval. Once a university's IQAP has been approved, that institution will be responsible for developing and reviewing its undergraduate and graduate programs using the procedures defined in its IQAP. The Quality Council will be responsible for reviewing and approving all new undergraduate and graduate programs by 2011-2012. The Quality Council will also undertake audits of undergraduate and graduate program reviews of each university on an eight-year cycle to ensure compliance with the IQAP.

During the transition to the new framework, the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies will continue its function of approving new graduate programs, and the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee will complete the final two audits of institutions.

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Ontario universities now home to five new Chairs

HEALTH, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

Ontario's capacity in renewable energy technologies and health and green chemistry and engineering was strengthened in 2010 with the awarding of three new Ontario Research Chair positions.

The Ontario Research Chair in Renewable Energy Technologies and Health was awarded to the University of Waterloo and its candidate, Dr. Siva Sivothythaman. A member of Waterloo's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Dr. Sivothythaman will develop new technical approaches and provide guidelines in setting standards to ensure that health and safety are top priorities in the manufacturing, use, and end-of-life phases of renewable energy technologies.

The two Ontario Research Chairs in Green Chemistry and Engineering were awarded to Queen's University and its candidate, Dr. Michael Cunningham, and to Trent University and its candidate, Dr. Suresh Narine. Dr. Cunningham's research interests are in polymer science, with a focus on replacing environmentally harmful processes that use organic solvents with more environmentally friendly water-based processes that do not use solvents. A member of Queen's Department of Chemical Engineering, Dr. Cunningham will exploit new materials that can "switch" their properties and the latest chemistry techniques to control polymer product properties, using manufacturing methods that minimize impact on the environment.

Dr. Narine is a pioneering scientist in the use of natural oils to develop new high-value, high-performance and toxic-free/neutral chemicals, materials and polymers. He is a member of both the Department of Chemistry and the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Trent University, the Director of Trent's Biomaterials Research Program, and a leading researcher in the university's Centre of Knowledge in the Environment.

The Ministry of the Environment provided the funding for all three chairs: \$1.5 million in total funding over a five-year term for the Chair in Renewable Energy Technologies and Health; and \$1.25 million in total funding over a five-year term for each Ontario Research Chair in Green Chemistry and Engineering.

HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCES

The Ontario Research Chair in Health Human Resources was awarded to McMaster University and its candidate, Dr. Arthur Sweetman, a leading researcher in health and labour economics. His research – funded by a \$3 million endowment from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care as part of the province's health human resources strategy – will help Ontario to advance as leader in health workforce research and modelling. A professor and former director of the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University, Dr. Sweetman will formally take the position at McMaster University on July 1.

MÉTIS STUDIES

The Chair in Métis Studies was awarded to the University of Ottawa and its candidate, Dr. Brenda Macdougall, a leading expert in the history of Métis and First Nations. Dr. Macdougall's work will increase our understanding of Métis history, culture, language and current issues in Ontario. A \$3 million endowment from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and an additional \$1 million from the University of Ottawa funded this Chair. Before taking up her position as the Chair in Métis Studies, Dr. Macdougall was a professor in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

COU administered these awards programs on behalf of the Ontario government, and an arm's length Selection Panel selected the winning institutions.